A Frankenstein under Red Agenda? An Analysis of the Effects of China’s Nationalism Campaign

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Abstract

This paper is a critique of China’s nationalism campaign. After the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, the Chinese communists found its ruling legitimacy in jeopardy. As Western journalists and scholars noticed, "Chinese leaders consciously cultivated nationalism as a new glue to unite the country." (Kristof, 2001)

Unger (1996) remarked that Chinese communists are disguising itself as a guard for China’s national interest, and nationalism is of practical value in its quest for new sources of ruling legitimacy. It is not uncommon for nations in transition to resort to nationalism to divert the domestic dissatisfaction from the government to foreigners. However, as China is a country with serious separatist issues, such emphasis on nationalism in the public domain will have a double-edged effect. Meanwhile, China’s relatively rational diplomacy will look like cowardice in the context of a media campaign for nationalism and thus in the long run will hurt the legitimacy of the government instead of strengthening it. At the end of the analysis, the author suggests a more cultural-based nationalism campaign.